War

The War and the Nation's Larger Call to World Evangelism

Address
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Robert E. Speer,
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By Robert E. Speer

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WHEN the war began we saw in the nations immediately involved, and in some smaller measure in our own land, an illustration of the fact that in time of emergency or strain man instinctively contracts and conserves his resources, while God releases and enlarges his. That is a fact of no little significance in its bearing upon our thought with regard both to the being and to the character of God. And now that we also have been drawn into this great struggle, we are seeing among ourselves the illustration of this same fact in a far more vivid way.

Questions have been at once raised on every side as to whether some of our activities must not be abridged, whether, in the interest of achieving the great task that is now clearly paramount, other things must not be sacrificed. Very naturally these questions will arise most insistently with regard to those interests that seem most remote—our activities and relationships among distant peoples. Are we to acquiesce in the idea that these must be held now in

abeyance for a while, that the immediate purposes of the nation will require every energy and resource, and that the Christian church, for the time being at least, must postpone her work of larger world evangelization?

The attitude which the churches will take on this question will be largely determined by the attitude which we take, and which other gatherings of men like ours also will be taking, across our land, within the next few weeks. If our position is weak and faltering, if our own conviction is not clear and solidly grounded, we shall see within the next few months the collapse of some of our most important Christian activities, and shall have in subsequent years slowly to recover ground that in these days, in our negligence and carelessness, we had surrendered.

Are we prepared this morning deliberately to commit ourselves to the position taken in the Message of the Federal Council to the churches, that there must be no curtailment whatever of the activities or ministries of the Christian church? What I have to say is in support of the position, not only that there should be no such curtailment, but that we are to hear and to respond to what the topic assigned to me describes as the larger call of the war and the nation to the church in its task of world evangelization.

We have no need to be affrighted in such a situation as this. It is such an easy thing to lose the right perspective, to be intimidated by what is contemporary, not to see things in their large proportions, and

not to draw, as we ought clearly to draw in this hour, the true lessons of the past. Great national crises have not been deemed sufficient in the past to justify the extinction of the church's missionary activities. The great missionary organizations of Europe grew up in times of national strain, greater and more critical even than those we face to-day. The first American missionaries, including Adoniram Judson, went out during the War of 1812. When the Civil War broke upon our nation, when every energy and resource of a people was enlisted in a great life and death struggle, even then the heart of the nation in the Christian church was not stifled nor blunted in its consciousness of missionary obligation. There are some here who will recall the facts of which our friend, Dr. Houston, was speaking in a noble address in 1888, when he referred to the origin of the missionary work in his own church in the Southern states: "When in that day," said he, "she found herself girt about as with a wall of fire, when no missionary had it in his power to go forth from her bosom to the regions beyond, the first General Assembly put on record the solemn declaration that, as this church now unfurled her banner to the world, she desired deliberately and distinctly to inscribe on it, in immediate connection with the headship of her Lord, his last command, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,' regarding this as the great end of her organization, and obedience to it as the indispensable condition of her Lord's promised presence." And the

spirit that found expression in that first General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church, was the spirit that was reigning in all the churches of the nation, North and South, during the days of the Civil War.

I made a study not long ago of the reports of one of the foreign mission boards for the four years of the Civil War, to find out whether our fathers had felt that they were justified in those days of crisis in curtailing the church's work of world evangelization. Not so. This deliverance of one church would be found, I think, characteristic of all: "New missions are needed. Shall they be established? Is it inquired, where are the means? We answer, they are in the hands of the Christians, who are God's stewards. Let a proper demand be made. Let this Assembly call on the churches, and that call will be answered. The response will come in the spirit of that consecration in which all God's people have laid themselves and their all upon his altar." It would be found in the case of many of our denominational missionary agencies that they emerged from the Civil War with enlarged contributions from the churches. One representative board testified that it had to withdraw not a single missionary, to close not a single mission field, to withhold not a single foreign missionary who had been prepared to go out. And, though during those last days, when our exchange was worth only fifty cents on the dollar abroad, dark clouds overhung our missionary operations, not one of our Ameri-

can churches felt that it was justified in drawing back from its world task.

The great churches in the nations that have been at war the last three years, though they have borne heavy burdens, heavier burdens, God grant, than we may be called upon to carry, have with few exceptions not curtailed, and without exception have not withdrawn, their foreign missionary undertakings. The London Missionary Society last year cleared off a large indebtedness and carried forward its work without diminution. The Wesleyan Society received the largest income that it has ever received in its entire history. The English Baptist Society closed its fiscal year without a deficit. The Methodist Church in Canada had a larger income than it had ever had in any year of peace. Adding all together the missionary activities of Great Britain, the income of the missionary societies for the year ending March 31, 1916, exceeded considerably the income of the year before the war.

When we turn to think of what we have been doing, of what it is that some are proposing that we shall need now to abridge, is it possible for us to maintain an attitude of timidity? One hundred and thirty American missionary societies last year gave $24,688,000—an average of less than one dollar per capita for the Protestant membership of the churches in the United States. Is it contended by any one that we are to be so reduced that our Protestant church-membership cannot contribute one dollar per annum

per capita to maintain these undertakings abroad? We can pay all our taxes and do all our other duties and perform this one also with no mentionable sacrifice.

Have the principles changed on which the undertaking rests, or have the world facts that we face been altered by new conditions that have now arisen, except to be made more urgent? The great commission was not given in any time of ease, nor was it conditioned upon the softness of obedience and accomplishment. It was given in far more strenuous and difficult days even than those that we confront now. Nothing in spiritual principle—or in the facts of the world, as we look out upon them at home or abroad—justifies us for one moment in considering that it will be necessary for us to abridge our work of world evangelization.

Precisely the same principles hold with regard to the offering of life. Difficult problems are raised here for many men. Missionaries at home on furlough, missionaries busy in their work, young men who are under appointment or who have planned to go out to missionary service—the individual question will face each of them as to what his own personal duty is, and we may not answer that question for him by any generalized statement. But we may answer it for the church in her collective obligations. The church is not reduced now and she never has been reduced to such a pass that she must surrender part of her duty in order to be able to do some other part of it. There

is life enough in our nation and in the church to-day to make it possible for them to accomplish all their necessary undertakings. Most of all must we have life free to carry on the great constructive and creative tasks, the tasks of ministry and preservation and brotherhood and love.

I went last Saturday to see the French steamer *Espagne* sail with several hundred young men from our colleges and universities—Williams, Dartmouth, Princeton, Northwestern, and others scattered all over the land, young men going off for service in the hospitals or with the Red Cross, for ambulance work in France, for moral and religious service with the British armies—several hundred of these lads, happy in their faces, sober, but glad of heart, eager to be off about a great unselfish ministry. Do we mean to say we cannot find them with the same will to render a yet farther service, a will to go yet more broadly out across the world than Belgium and England and France and Mesopotamia?

During the days of the Civil War, with men as with money, our churches were able to find those whom they required. Boards reported, the second year of the war, that they had the largest number of missionary candidates they had ever had in their history, and, in the very height of the war, they made their appeal for fresh supplies of candidates on the ground that young men were offering themselves for the service of the two causes, North and South, and must be not less zealous to offer themselves for the

cause that was greater than all, the cause that would make all war and conflict impossible when once it was successfully carried through. Listen to the words of those days: "The promptness, energy, and abundance with which our young men have come forward during the past year to engage in our armies for the defense of our nation should encourage Christians to pray for that increased devotion of our sons to the service of Christ which is demanded to provide ministers and missionaries to go into the fields which are now open to hear the gospel." Neither in money nor in men is the Christian church to-day warranted in tolerating the idea of curtailment or abridgement in our work of world evangelization.

But this is putting it all very mildly. Not only must there be no contraction in this undertaking, but we are called now in these days more vividly than ever before to aim, distinctly and unhesitatingly, at enlargement. We are called to this by the fact that the war has transferred a larger measure of the missionary obligation to America. Those of us here this evening who were present at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910 will remember the statement by both the German and British delegates who were there, in recognition of the fact that the primacy in the missionary undertaking had even then crossed the sea. That burden has been immensely increased in the years that have gone by. It may be that the European churches, barring a few of them, the Moravians and the French Evangelical churches, will not be

largely dependent upon us for financial assistance, but for many a day they will need the life that America can give and that America alone will have to spare. I imagine in no sections of the world will this new duty be more distinct than among the Mohammedan nations. It is a burden resting heavily upon many a Christian conscience in Germany to-day as to how the Mohammedan problem is to be dealt with by German churches in the future, in view of the alliances of the present war. In more regards than there is time to speak of here, the war has passed over a heavier weight of missionary duty upon the churches of America. In the face of that larger obligation, dare we talk of standing still, still less of drawing back?

The war has brought us into new relations of understanding and of sympathy. Both southward and westward we have heavily increased our missionary duty. It has been one of the saddest facts of international relationship, for the last half generation at least, that there has been a growing feeling of alienation between the Latin-American nations and the United States, that men like Manuel Ugarte, who held the devotion of many of the young men of Latin America, could go up and down those lands, like a flame of fire, preaching the doctrine of deep isolation and dislike between the Latin-American nations and their nearest neighbors, who should be their best friends, north of the Rio Grande. At the same time, Latin America's devotion has been given in unstinted measure for years to France. And it would seem to

be something in the providence of God that the new relations into which we have been drawn with France might be the bridge over the chasm that has opened between us and Latin America, and that our common kinship and association with France to-day might reunite us who had been so rapidly and bitterly drifting apart here in these Western lands. Between ourselves and Japan and China also new understandings and confidences have grown on account of the war. Our missionary duty southward and westward has been multiplied twofold at least by the developments of the war abroad.

The war has increased our missionary obligations by more deeply revealing the world's need of the gospel to heal its sin and make it one. I had with me, in my home on Sunday, a Japanese friend. He had been only a few days before to hear Dr. Jefferson preach, and he said: "Mr. Speer, I see clearly that if there is any solution at all to this great problem, there is only one solution. That is Christ. Christ alone can meet the need of the world and unite the hearts of men." We see to-day the futility of every other device with which men have dreamed of binding the nations together. There is no peace of Dives. No strands of political or diplomatic understanding can relate the nations inseparably. We see now that war will be done away in Christ or it will never be done away at all, and, seeing this so clearly to-day, our duty to act upon this conviction is deepened and intensified, and our missionary obligation many-fold enlarged.

It is enlarged, oh! how mightily it is enlarged, by the visible and tragic need of the world for an incarnation of a universal brotherly love. It will not do to talk and emotionalize over it. It will not do to pass resolutions regarding it, nor to send communications describing its glory, from one nation to another. The thing never will be made a reality except by incarnation, by such actual functionings of the Christian church across the world as will utter visibly and tangibly to men the spirit of a universal trust and love. To abate any of our duty of missionary activity, to call in the foreign missionaries, to reduce the work they are doing, is to stultify our declaration that we believe in a world brotherhood, or that we would penetrate mankind with a spirit of universal goodwill and friendship. Words can never make that real to the world. And if in this day we contract our acts, no expansion of our speech will ever make good our betrayal. We are called by the very facts of the world before us now to enlarge the agencies and visible functionings of the incarnation of love in flesh and blood that goes out from us, to express love and kinship to the nations.

We need the missionary enterprise to-day for these great purposes more than it has ever been needed in the history of the world before. We need it as an expression in flesh of our conviction that humanity is one. We need it because it alone embodies a true doctrine of race function and race relationship. We need it because it appears to be about the only instru-

mentality of Christianity that utters a clear and uncompromised super-nationalistic principle. How hard is our problem to-day in all these lands in dealing with the question of the relationship of Christianity and the spirit of nationalism! Has the problem been solved in any of these nations? While we work at it let us not abandon those great elements in Christianity which rise above even nationality. Whatever else we may surrender, let us not surrender the missionary enterprise. We can hold this fast to-day with no betrayal of our own nationalistic loyalty. And we need it. The new world that is coming needs it. Let us enlarge its functionings, and expand its activities, building up increasingly the bond which we have in it, which carries love across the gulf of race and nation and seeks to make mankind genuinely one. We need it because, in these days of strife and conflict over all the world, it seems to be about the only agency of international service that we possess. We are beginning to learn in these last few months that it is competent for a nation to give money away to other nations. It has been a long, slow lesson for us to learn, and maybe we shall forget it soon again. But we learned long ago and shall not forget that we have open in missionary enterprise free channels for interdenominational and international and interracial service. We need these to-day, not to be abridged, but to be extended.

Not only do the conditions of this present hour forbid our considering for one moment the proposal

that we should stop our missionary task. We face conditions that issue to us, in the language of this theme, a larger call. And it is not only a larger call to world love, uttered actually and tangibly in human lives, to which we are called now. We need the missionary undertaking undiminished because of the hope that it embodies and to which it steadfastly adheres. These are dark and doubtful days for many of us, when many a man whose Christian faith has not wavered begins to wonder whether after all the dream ever can come true. All around us these coming months, as the shadows darken and those come not back to us who went out from us—all the more in those days will the heavy doubts arise. We need to hold fast to an undertaking that tenaciously grasps the world hope, the confidence that the kingdom of God is to be in all the world, that can sing as some of the lads on the *Espagne* were singing as they sailed: "My anchor holds. It holds. My anchor holds."

The function of the Christian church is a double one. The Church is a witness to possibilities that lie beyond the facts. The Church never was meant to be the mere guaranty of what has become established. That has been its shame in past days. It has been thought of only as a religious sanction of the status quo. The real business of the Christian church has been to witness to the possibilities that were not yet seen, that lay invisible far beyond, that were themselves a contradiction of the existing facts. The Christian church is also the power by which these possibili-

ties are to be made facts, and all facts contradictory to them to be denied and overridden and done away. Both as witness and as power the church needs the breadth and boldness of the missionary hopes. We need to hold fast on the world plane to an undertaking that will not let go the idea of a world brotherhood, that will work for that, that even in these days when mankind is rent asunder, will ignore the chasm and will send out its representatives across the whole world, speaking its message of a world love and holding fast to its dream of a world hope.

I come back in closing to the one note on which, as I conceive, the theme was intended to lay the emphasis—the war and the nation's *larger* call. Let us not yield to any influences that would make us smaller men to-day than we were five years ago, nor yield to any ideals or pressures that would contract our vision or narrow the field or strangle the forces of our ministry. This is the day for men to look out more widely over the world and to be more daring and courageous in their hopes and faiths, for men to make sacrifices broader and more courageous, more ample than they ever have made before, for them to think not in terms of one nation's relationship to another nation only, but in the wide terms of the interrelations of all men. It is a day when world measurements should be laid down upon all our thoughts.

They should be laid upon our thoughts of penitence and foregiveness. I read last evening the speech of Donald McLean, Deputy Chairman of Committees of

the House of Commons, made only a few weeks ago in London. "Too much blame," said he, "too much responsibility, I should say, is thrown by us on circumstances. When the prodigal son came home again, he did not greet his father with a long recital of temptations to which he had been subjected," or of the conditions that forced him into what he had done. "His message was, 'Father, I have sinned.' In this great struggle in which we are engaged, we shall not lessen the burden of our national responsibility for our sins by dwelling upon the iniquities of Germany. We have to bear the burden of our own sins." We need this larger outlook to-day to give us world thoughts of penitence and forgiveness.

We need it, because it must be a world scale of sacrifice that shall dominate our life and the life of the church now. We betray our mission and fail God if we shrink into a nationalistic sect that can conceive only of our own national functions, unless those include the whole human brotherhood and the duty of speaking and thinking and living by the law of a world love.

We need to write that word "wider" on all our prayer and service, shrinking back, as from the voice of antichrist, from whatever shall suggest to us any abridgement or curtailment or withholding of the living, saving, creating ministries of Christ at home and abroad. To these the world and God's voice in the world are calling us to-day.

The phrases of John Milton's great prayer I have read over and over again these last few days:

"The times and seasons pass along under thy feet, to go and come at thy bidding, and as thou didst dignify our fathers' days with many revelations, above all their foregoing ages since thou tookest the flesh, so thou canst vouchsafe to us, though unworthy, as large a portion of thy spirit as thou pleasest, for who shall prejudice thy all-governing will, seeing the power of thy grace is not passed away with the primitive times, as fond and faithless men imagine, but thy kingdom is now at hand and thou standing at the door. Come forth out of thy chamber, O Prince of all the kings of the earth. Put on the robes of thy imperial majesty. Take up that unlimited scepter which thy almighty Father hath bequeathed thee, for now the voice of thy bride calls thee and all creatures sigh to be renewed."

In that spirit, and in that enlarged and ample faith, if the church will but open her life unhindered to the infinite God, may it not be that he could even now work through her, in us, the miracle of righteousness and of peace?